

Wednesday, August 21, 2002

## WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

### Hobby Knoll: Duxbury's Flagship at the Fair

Phil Anderson drives a team six of Clydesdales at the Marshfield Fair like it was second nature. He keeps them and trains them at Duxbury's Hobby Knoll (582-0034), where his mother Ann Anderson also keeps and trains around 35 head of Morgan Horses.

Hobby Knoll is a 16-acre farm on Taylor Street, just off High Street behind the Methodist Church. I met Phil and his wife Renee at the Fair, at their massive display of horses and vintage wagons. The Fair's primary purpose is education in agriculture and our rural history. The Andersons' Clydesdales take center stage, with periodic shows in the horse ring and a tented display in between. Demonstrations are loosely scheduled, since the shows have to fit between the pulling competitions and other events in the ring. Check times when you visit the tent. Ask first, but yes, you can pat the horses.

A team of six Clydesdales is a lesson in coordination. Each horse is guided — two reins to each horse, so Phil has quite a handful. In the days of working delivery wagons, drivers had a helper, but Phil drives the team alone for the shows. That's somewhere around 18,000 pounds of horse. Phil says when they're loose and galloping in the pasture, you feel the earth move. It's not recommended when they're hitched to a wagon! After years of training, though, they know their jobs and who's in charge. The *lead team* is in front, followed by the *swing team*, and the *wheel team* next to the wagon. The wheel team is the biggest and strongest, but the whole operation depends on the smaller, more responsive lead team. They're the ones that must follow the driver's control without question. As Phil puts it, "If I told them to crash through the fence, they'd do it."

They were bred for that kind of courage and loyalty. Knights in armor needed a massive horse to carry them into battle. Scotland answered with Clydesdales. They carried warriors, and were warriors themselves. Phil says now they're strictly for show. That warrior obedience, with a little warrior flair, stays with the breed. They are certainly flashy and proud with their white-feathered hooves

and high heads. You won't see Phil's horses in the ring for the Horse Pull competition Thursday the 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:00 pm, though. Phil says the Belgians and other breeds are bigger, and Clydesdales are little too hot-blooded for the work.

Daughter Bronwyn, by the way, got a chance to meet Prince, the left swing horse. She may meet him again. You may remember I'm partial to lavish promises at the Fair, and Phil and Renee run hayrides, birthdays, and weddings with their Clydesdales. The eye-popper for me, though, was that they teach driving lessons. I can learn — I mean, Bronwyn can learn — how



to hitch a team and handle basic maneuvers, for the same kind of money as a regular riding lesson, right here in Duxbury. What a town.

What a Fair, too. I caught the Ox Pull on Saturday. Ray McKay, one of the Fair Directors, told me what an ox is: "Castrate a bull, and you've got a steer. Put a yoke on him, and you've got a draft steer. Keep him pulling for four years, and you've got an ox."

Now I know — you don't become an ox without considerable sacrifice and labor, but the result might be worth it. Ray says a horse can be stronger, but an ox can keep pulling hour after hour, day after day. That's why pioneers used them to haul their Conestogas across the prairie. So you see, the Fair really is about learning, preserving agricultural and rural experience, and planting seeds that grow (or lavish promises that haunt).

Those seeds do grow, and bear fruit — Bronwyn and I entered our eggs this year for the first time (Adult Class), the fruit of last year's Fair promise. I explained to her that the Egg Judging is on opening day to draw a big crowd for the fried dough hawkers and thrill-ride owners, so they'll get a good start. She laughed. But you should have seen her face when we saw the egg results: we won a blue ribbon!